

Circumstantial Ethics in Albanian Higher Education: Volitional vs Arbitrary Participation of the Bologna System

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Abstract

Circumstantial ethics in Albanian higher education: volitional vs arbitrary participation of the Bologna system. Ethics and ethical behavior are major study topics (Banerjee, 1998) among business and academic circles (Bass & Hebert, 1995). Reports of unethical behaviors and the bypass of the societal code of conduct have drawn heavy criticism from the public and according to Bass and Hebert (1995) they have "led to a decline of public trust (pg. 727)". Charitable philanthropic organizations such as Helping Hearts and Hands, International Humanities Center and private for-profit organizations such WorldCom, Enron, Lehman Brothers, Bernie Madoff etc., are some of the few names that people associate with when speaking about unethical behavior. According to Ho (2011), philosophically speaking, ethical behavior is ascribing oneself to "good" or "right" behavior. Moreover, ethical decision-making is determined by individuals using their moral base to determine what's right or wrong (Ho, 2011). Congruently, Davis and Frederick (1984) define ethics as "the rules or principles that define right and wrong conduct (p. 76)." However, Grazioli (1990) states that even the most respected, sincere and brilliant minds can be wrecked on by the combination of "progressive humanistic logic and situational ethics (pg. 112)." In fact, Parsa and Lankford (1999) believe that ethical and unethical behaviors are a function of the person and the environment. Banerjee (1998) concluded, based on the work of Rosen (in Banerjee, 1998) that ethical/unethical behavior is some special occurring within the realm of human behavior. In other words, Banerjee (1988) states that ethical and unethical behavior is existent but simply is differentiated to the extent the kind of moral judgment that represents one's aura and personal moral developments in different situations. Situational ethics, a term coined by Joseph Fletcher who is identified as the "Father of Situation Ethics" (McHugh, 2006) contends that the right and wrong depend upon the situation and there are no universal moral rules or rights and each case deserves unique solution. It can also describe "the situational factors associated with an ethical dilemma (Robertson, et al., 2002, pg. 328)." As such was the decision to adopt the Bologna-system of education in 2003 by the Albanian policy-makers and apply it to Albanian public and private universities. This paper attempts to explore the main cause for the adaptation of the Bologna higher education system. It is often assume that elected officials act on behalf of their constituents with good intentions. However, even decision makers who have good intentions can fall pray of unethical behavior in situational-induced biases circumstances (Kellaris, Boyle, & Dahlstrom, 1994). In fact, circumstances have always been a focus of analysis for scientists in many different social sciences—sociology, anthropology, economics, politics etc. (Todeva, 1997)

1. Paper's Aim

This paper theorizes that although in actionable plan Albania volitionally adopted the Bologna higher education system, the country was arbitrarily "forced" to adopt such system as a condition to join the European Union. The argument seeks to explain that policy makers confronted a circumstantial ethics decision to implement such system in the light of hope to join the European Union. It further elaborates and theorizes that the situational ethics decision facing the policy makers was amidst the choice of joining the "European dream" or bettering the higher education in Albania.

2. Literature Review

For the purpose of understanding what meanings each studied component carries, I find it essential to define the difference between volition and arbitrary participation. Since adoption of the Bologna system Albania has undergone several reformative changes in educational structures (Whitehead, 2000) and for that reason, I have drawn from the expertise of Ellis and Fouts (1994) to define volitional and arbitrary participation.

Ellis and Fouts (1994) constructed two sets of perspectives in restructuring education. The first presents the "energizing forces (p. 26)" compiled by volitional and arbitrary participation. The second perspective focuses on the "outcome (p. 26)" of restructuring efforts. Although both sets of perspectives could be discussed in-depth while facing a situational ethics decision, I will focus solely on the *energizing forces* of restructuring. The second set of perspective

which focuses on the *outcome* could also be vital to understanding how the restructuring has occurred and its current continuous changes. Maybe it is a framework tool for future research to understand the intentions intended and outcomes achieved.

Energizing forces is the term where Ellis and Fouts (1994) clustered volitional and arbitrary restructuring participation. To them, volitional participatory is the emblem of a focused, inclusive and organic goal-driven system that defines "the nature of changes to be sought (pg. 27)." Thus far, there is no malintention to participate in a system that seeks out the benefit of stakeholders. However, the vice versa occurs when external locus demands random changes; in fact, this is what Ellis and Fouts (1994) describe arbitrary participation as. Moreover, it could be considered a top-down decision that all truly "understood is that change must be made (pg. 30)" whereas there is no evidence of it happening and gives a false impression "that evidence is taking place (pg. 31)." Part of the issue in my opinion is attributed mostly to politicians and policy makers. In business terms, according to Gelinas (2007) the situational ethics dimension is inspired by the manager's duty to organizational employers and assumed to be independent. That is, in parallelism, policy-makers' duty is to seek employment of policies to the benefit of who they represent which are the people of Albania.

The governing officials, including politicians and authorities, who were given the responsibility to differentiate between potential short-term gain such as the Stabilization and Association Agreement (Dhima, 2011) and long-term failed or non-visible effects (Kurti, 2012) failed at potentially framing the issue as a decision that could possibly affect negatively the future university body: the students. One of the concerns that come along with the failure to frame and reframe the issues from different lenses is that ethical choices may be influenced (Kellaris et al., 1994). Moreover, guiding officials must always act on behalf of the interests of the masses and should govern by moral principles justifiable independently and circumstantially to create a reality (Levy, 2005). Of course, we use trust to simplify the world and to rely on our leader's thinking abilities to make the right decision even though more often than not, it is taken for granted albeit its integral role in our daily lives (Goto, 1996). Usually, it is the trust that we delegate to come up with effective solutions with the intention of creating productive and well-functioning realities. It is open for discussion the reality that governing authorities created with the attachment of a new unproven alteration for educational and societal change in Albania. The principle for the betterment of the youth's future is a potential argument. That is, seeking entrance into the European Union to expand the body of knowledge and wealth of opportunities for future generations. That could supposedly be the argument of authorities which validates Levy's (2005) implication between a principle applied correctly because of some rational or logical relation between the situation one is surrounded in and the one's principle. If that is so, then surely the situational ethics not only were compromised but, in my opinion, the European Union carries the arbitrary burden of creating a false momentum, although speculative in nature, to succeed the initiative of the *Magna Charta Universitatum*.

3. Framing

The context of this paper does not convey negative connotation pertaining to the adoption of the Bologna system but it rather seeks to shed light on the difference between the so-called "volitional" participation and conditional "arbitrary" participation in the adoption of the Bologna system.

Moreover, the angle which this paper is built upon is not about the choice whether to embrace or reject the European Union reforms. Nor is the point to target policy makers for making a *decision* to encompass the Bologna system but it rather sits policy makers in the seat of facing a situational ethics *decision* from the perspective of choosing between the unification with European Union and the enhanced enlightenment of the people of Albania. Although some scholars (Qefalia & Totoni, 2012) have defended the adoption of the Bologna system as the enlightenment and the increased quality of higher education in Albania, I firmly disagree and further, aside the topic whether Bologna system increased the quality of higher education in Albania, I seek to point out that policy makers faced a situation whereas situational ethical judgment had to be deployed. Note, contrary to other scholars (Qefalia & Totoni, 2012; Celu, Qarri, & Dumi, 2012), I align with Kurti's (2012) and Kume & Dharmo (2013) assumptions that the quality of education that the Bologna system effects in Albania have contributed to has been negligible and/or insignificant and has yet to "show a functional suitability for higher education (pg. 109)."

Since my main concern is with the type of ethics used and the way these ethics were employed when determining the adoption of the Bologna system, righteously so, one may appropriately ask if we should try to abide and adhere to absolute formal principles or whether we should try to adapt them to the constraints permitted by the situation. Mabry (1999) concluded that conformance to rigidity and absolutes threaten the solvency of complexities found in practical matters within certain boundaries. If so, then, the simplest matters would be trapped between the layers of bureaucracy.

4. Theoretical Perspective

The established ground that the *decision* to adopt the Bologna system was volitionally for the sake of unification with the European Union, I challenge *it* as arbitrary upon being recognized as "a potential candidate country" for European Union (Dhima, 2011) even though the Bologna Declaration went into effect upon signing by the Albanian authorities in September of 2003 (Kume & Dhimo, 2013) volitionally.

Earlier in the paper, I described the definition of arbitrary control. Now I focus on describing what its practice resolves. I believe that the changes brought by the Bologna system found Albanian education system not prepared. My argument is such because of the shortsighted years and experience that Albanian educational system carries in comparison to many other older European education systems that already have an established infrastructure for restructuring changes. It was not until 1957, that the first and the only remaining university until 1972, the State University of Tirana was founded (Schmidt-Neke, 2007). On comparison, some of the western modern universities were found in France earlier than 17th century (Horner, 2007) with University of Paris dating back to 13th century (Paris-Sorbonne University, 2014), in the Netherlands late 17th century (Ven, 2007), in Spain earlier 18th century (Usarralde, 2007) with University of Salamanca in 13th century (University of Salamanca, 2014) and most notably, the evolvement of the University of Bologna in late 11th century (University of Bologna, 2014; Berman, 1985).

In my opinion, the unpreparedness and the inexperience of the former Albanian higher education to host a more so-called *modern* type of education led some of today's issues in higher education that could be later examined in a different paper. Maybe a perspective that could offer valuable insights is that the inexperience and the unpreparedness are closely related and vulnerable to external demand as well as, figuratively, prone to foreign control. When speaking about external demand, as such I include influence from outside forces willing to bent new agents for certain reforms, I include the concept as a whole but since this theoretical perspective focuses on the adoption of the Bologna system, its argument will focus solely on the higher education portion. Thus, it is logical and practical and it makes sense overall, to theorize that European Union demanded certain reformative actions from countries seeking entrance in the European Union and as such, their reformative actions must conform to a set of pre-set standards set forth by the EU. The issue with that is that some systems, like Albania's, were not fully ready to accept these transformational changes unless proper guidance was issued. If that is the case, then it makes sense for policy makers to be placed in a "situation" whither each decision may or may not affect its benefactors either positively or negatively. For that purpose, I see the decision to adopt the Bologna system as an ethical choice between joining European Union, or at least a step ahead, or the possible degradation of the higher education system. Presently, the matter is whether that choice was volitional or requested.

5. Discussion

Ethicists struggle with the issue of a single widely accepted universal, worldly long-standing truth and to many, it is about a truth that could and is applicable regardless of applicability, culturally-bounded, religiously-motivated and historically- or sociologically-shaped (Auer, 2005).

In a review on Kelly's (1999) work *Ethics at Work*, author claims that in a world where different problems [situations] exist, there is no reality of an absolute truth to base off all ethical codes and behaviors (Auer, 2005). Thus, in a universe full of problems, there is no *one* absolute way of dealing with issues expect with a spectrum of practical ethics and therefore, such truth must be defined and pertain to problem-solving as forth set by stakeholders. Similarly, pragmatic circumstantial ethics (*the desire to join the European Union*) practiced by policy makers at the time of adaptation of a new higher education system were questioned by its constituents whose main foci was the development of an outcome-based education (OBE). Spady (in Brandt, 1992) has defined OBE a "culminating demonstration of learning." Currently, I seriously question that Albania has reached its learning culmination and therefore, it hasn't built and outcome-based education system. I partly attribute the failure of governing authorities to their incapacitation of filtering decisions through different compartments.

The failure to filter decisions through different lenses by governing authorities has influenced ethical choices (Kellaris et al., 1994) and thus, altered their ethical behavior. Hence, it is suitable to assume that ethical choices have been relatively changed. According to an ethical issue-contingent model developed by Jones (1991), individual ethics are relative as they focus on neither individual variables nor agency variable solely. Furthermore, the model considers the moral characteristics of the issue and it encompasses six components: (1) magnitude of consequences, (2) social consensus, (3) probability of effect, (4) temporal immediacy, (5) proximity and (6) concentration of effect. In other words,

it is acceptable with high degree of certainty to assume that it may be possible that one of the conditions that policy-makers have acted upon are the positive consequential magnitude of the represented which are the Albanian people based on probable effects that will have on the perceived attempts that Albania is committing to join the European Union. Although perceived as a strategic move, the adaptation of the Bologna-system was, in my opinion, faulty and flawed. The results are a good evidence of that. For example, Albania incepted the Bologna-system in 2003 and on June 24th, 2014, Albania was granted the status of candidate to join the European Union (European Commission, 2014). Even though the effort initiated in 2003, eleven years later it was possible for the Albanians to solely become a status candidate. Retrospectively speaking, it is obvious that the effect intended by the governing authorities has reached neither the goal of getting the status candidate for the European Union (at least not until June 24th, 2014) nor the enhancement in the quality of the higher education in Albania.

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